

EVENT INFORMATION SHEET

First Annual “Solar America Cities” Meeting April 15, 2008

TUCSON, AZ. Today in Tucson, representatives from all twenty-five cities named as Solar America Cities by Energy Secretary Samuel W. Bodman over the past twelve months gathered together for the first time to strategize about the best ways to increase the role of solar energy in their cities. The cities intend to become national centers for solar energy best practices that can share their lessons with other cities across America.

Mayors of four Solar America Cities were in attendance, while U.S. Representative Gabrielle Giffords (D-AZ) connected with the group remotely. Tucson mayor Bob Walkup welcomed the elite group to his city. “I want to see a 100 megawatt photovoltaic installation in Tucson,” said Walkup. Tucson recently acquired 20,000 acres of farmland to site such a system, which would be large enough to power roughly 40,000 homes.

The keynote address was given by Mayor Will Wynn of Austin, Texas, chairman of the Energy Committee of the U.S. Conference of Mayors. “Austin is proud to have been selected as one of the inaugural Solar America Cities,” Wynn said, “and we take that charge seriously. We are investing real money in aggressive – and progressive – initiatives to expand solar installations and job creation in our city. At this conference we hope to learn from – and maybe even inspire – other cities.”

Last year, the Department of Energy (DOE) launched the Solar America Cities program, which partners cities of 100,000 or more with DOE to help build sustainable solar infrastructures within the cities. Each city is awarded roughly half a million dollars in financial and technical assistance by DOE, which is supplemented by contributions by the city and its partners. Technical assistance is provided by national laboratories, universities and private firms on behalf of DOE to help solve solar siting, permitting, regulatory, engineering and other issues.

Cal Broomhead, Energy and Climate Programs Manager for the City of San Francisco noted that this is a change of tack for the DOE. “This is the first time in over a decade that DOE has funded an event at which local governments can come together to discuss energy issues.”

The Solar America Cities program supports the President's Solar America Initiative, which aims to reach cost parity with grid power for solar electricity by 2015. Cities range in size from Ann Arbor, MI, and Berkeley, CA, which are slightly over 100,000 in population to New York City, the largest city in the U.S. The Solar America Cities are geographically diverse as well, from Seattle in the Northwest and Tucson in the Southwest, to Orlando in the Southeast and Boston in the Northeast. Over time, the Solar America Cities program is intended to become a network of solar solution providers that can support the nation's use of renewable energy.

"Knoxville is just getting started with solar," explained Madeleine Weil, Deputy Director for Policy and Communications for recently named Solar America City Knoxville, Tennessee. "We are very excited to be a part of this collaboration. We are learning solar energy lessons from across the country and hope to enact them in Knoxville."

"The level of enthusiasm among the cities is tremendous," commented Tom Kimbis, Director of the U.S. Solar Energy Program at DOE. "It's remarkable that twenty-five awards were made and twenty-five cities are here in Tucson to share their ideas and strategies for making their city programs successful. That demonstrates a very high level of commitment."

Benefits of achieving a Solar America City solar infrastructure include cleaner air, reduced health costs, a newly trained workforce in a high-tech field, more high-tech and installation jobs, and increased attraction of clean energy companies to the city.

"The Solar America City award is an integral step in uniting our local community to develop a strong solar economy," explained Jennifer Szaro, Renewable Energy Coordinator for the Orlando Utilities Commission. "Under the Solar America Cities program, Orlando's team has a goal of installing 15 megawatts of solar power by 2015."

For more information, go to www.solaramericacities.energy.gov.